

Message Text

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ACTION H-03

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT PARA 3)

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OREP, UNRWA, IS
SUBJECT: VISIT OF STAFFDEL MCCALL/ASHWORTH
TO UNRWA/GAZA

1. SUMMARY: SFRC STAFFDEL VISIT TO UNRWA/GAZA APRIL 28
REINFORCED STAFFDEL IMPRESSION THAT THE NEED FOR UNRWA
CONTINUES AND THAT UNRWA OPERATIONS ARE HIGHLY COST-
EFFECTIVE. THE THEME UNDERLYING MEETINGS IN GAZA WITH
UNRWA, GOI, GAZA RESIDENTS AND REFUGEES WAS THE GOI
EFFORT TO ERASE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN REFUGEES AND
RESIDENTS. THE FOLLOWING IS A BRIEF RESUME OF THE
STAFFDEL DISCUSSIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON APRIL 28, ASHWORTH AND MCCALL, ACCOMPANIED BY UNRWA
COMMISSIONER GENERAL MCELHINEY, WERE BRIEFED BY FAZA BY
UNRWA REGIONAL HEAD MAGNUS ERHENSTROM AND DEPUTY ROY
SKINNER ON THE SPECIAL NATURE OF THE GAZA PROGRAM.

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ERHENSTROM FELT THAT UNRWA/GAZA WAS STRONG ON RECTI-
FICATION (45 PERCENT OF ALL UNRWA RECTIFICATION COMES
FROM GAZA), DISTRIBUTION CONTROL AND SANITATION.
ACCORDING TO ERHENSTROM, THE REFUGEES WANT BETTER
EDUCATION, BETTER SHELTERS AND SANITATION AND COM-
PLETE RATIONS; ERHENSTROM EVALUATED THESE DEMANDS
AS NOT REALISTIC OR REASONABLE.

3. ERHENSTROM AND SKINNER RECOUNTED VARIOUS GOI ACTIVITIES WHICH INTERFER WITH UNRWA OPERATIONS OR SEEK TO ERASE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN REFUGEES AND RESIDENTS IN GAZA:

--DETENTION BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES. UNRWA TRIES TO HELP ANY REFUGEE WHO IS DETAINED. IT HAS BEEN OVER A YEAR SINCE ANY UNRWA/GAZA LOCAL STAFF HAD BEEN DETAINED BY THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES.

--DIFFERENCE IN NUMBER OF REFUGEES. DUE TO DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF REFUGEES, UNRWA'S REFUGEE COUNT EXCEEDS THE GOI'S BY APPROXIMATELY 100,000, CAUSING SUBSEQUENT DIFFERENT EVALUATIONS OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM.

--DISTRIBUTION OF RATIONS. THE GOI CONTENTS THAT UNRWA DISTRIBUTES RATIONS TO INELIGIBLES. ERHENSTROM FELT THAT RECTIFICATION OF RATION ROLLS, EXCEPT FOR DISQUALIFICATION FOR LEVEL OF INCOME, WAS ACCURATE TO WITHIN 1 PERCENT; REQUESTS TO THE GOI FOR NAMES OF THOSE REGISTERED WITH THE GOI LABOR EXCHANGE, IN ORDER TO DETERMINE WHO WAS WORKING IN ISRAEL AND EARNING UNREPORTED INCOME, HAD GONE UNANSWERED BECAUSE THE GOI DOES NOT WANT TO BE KNOWN AS COOPERATING WITH THE RECTIFICATION PROGRAM. NOR WILL THE GOI PROVIDE THE NAMES OF THOSE ABLE TO AFFORD TO LIVE IN THE NEW GOI HOUSING PROJECTS. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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--POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. ACCORDING TO ERHENSTROM, THERE IS NO POLITICIZING IN THE UNRWA CAMPS OR SCHOOLS. THE GOI IS ORGANIZING COMMUNITY COUNCILS AND REQUESTED THAT UNRWA LOCAL STAFF SIT ON THESE COUNCILS, A REQUEST PROHIBITED BY UNRWA REGULATIONS.

--ANNEXATION OF CAMPS BY MUNICIPALITIES. FOUR MUNICIPALITIES (RAFAH, KHAN YUNIS, DEIR EL BALAH AND GAZA) HAVE ANNEXED THE CAMPS INTO THEIR CITY LIMITS, BOTH TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND TO INCLUDE THEM INTO THE TAX SYSTEM. THE MAYOR OF GAZA, RASHID SHAWA, HOWEVER, HAS REFUSED TO TAX THE BEACH CAMP REFUGEES BECAUSE HE VIEWS THIS AS ANOTHER GOI ATTEMPT TO ERASE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN REFUGEES AND RESIDENTS. (MCELHINEY NOTED THAT UNRWA DOES ALLOW PAYMENT OF FEES FOR SERVICES RENDERED.)

--SCHOOL CURRICULUM. IN THE SCHOOLS, UNRWA/GAZA USES EGYPTIAN EXAMS AND THOSE EGYPTIAN TEXTS WHICH ARE APPROVED BY THE GOI (35 OF 81 BOOKS), BUT THE GOI CONTINUES TO PRESS FOR HEBREW LANGUAGE TRAINING.

--GOI PREPAID HEALTH PROGRAM. BEGINNING IN APRIL 1978, THE GOI OFFERED THE OPTION TO THE REFUGEES

EVALUATED BY EHRENSTROM AND SKINNER AS
AN EFFECTIVE, LOW-COST PROGRAM, WHICH REDUCES
UNRWA EXPENSES. UNRWA WOULD RATHER THE REFUGEES
NOT JOIN BECAUSE THEY VIEW THE PROGRAM AS ANOTHER
GOI EFFORT TO TREAT REFUGEES AND RESIDENTS ALIKE.

--GOI DEMOLITION OF SHELTERS. UNRWA IS STILL SEEKING
COMPENSATION FOR THOSE 2,000 REFUGEES WHO
WERE DISPLACED BY ISRAELI DEMOLITIONS OF THEIR
SHELTERS IN 1971. UNRWA OBJECTS TO THE ISRAELI
PRACTICE OF THINNING THE CAMPS BY REQUIRING REFUGEES
WHO PURCHASE HOUSING IN THE NEW GOI HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS
TO DESTROY THEIR SHELTERS. THE GENERAL IMPRESSION
IS THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE, IF INDIRECT, GOI
PRESSURE ON THE REFUGEES TO PURCHASE THIS HOUSING.
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THE REFUGEE FEELS THREATENED BY THE GOI OFFER OF SUBSIDIZED
HOUSING IN A NEW DEVELOPMENT, BECAUSE THE OFFER IMPLIES THAT THE GOI
HAS MARKED HIS SHELTER FOR FUTURE DEMOLITION (WITH
OR WITHOUT COMPENSATION BY THE GOI). CONSEQUENTLY,
REFUGEES SWITCH RATHER THAN FIGHT.

--GOI PUBLICATIONS. UNRWA ALSO OBJECTED TO THE GOI
PUBLICATION ENTITLED "REFUGEE PROBLEMS CAN BE SOLVED",
WHICH THE STAFFDEL LABLED A GOI PROPAGANDA EFFORT,
BECAUSE IT IMPLIES THAT THERE IS NO NEED FOR UNRWA
IN GAZA. GOI OFFICIALS TOLD THE STAFFDEL THAT
THEY HAVE BEEN EMBARRASSED BY THE PUBLICATION AND
DO NOT AGREE WITH IT. UNRWA REPS DID CONCUR WITH
THE PAMPHLET IN THAT MOST OF THE HARSH CONDITIONS,
I.E., CURFEWS, ETC. UNDER THE EGYPTIAN RULE HAD
BEEN AMELIORATED.

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y TEXT PARA 4

4. THE STAFFDEL VISITED THE UNRWA SWEDISH MEDICAL CENTER AND RECEIVED A FULL DESCRIPTION OF THE FAMILY HEALTH PROGRAM WITH ITS FAMILY PLANNING UNIT. THE PROGRAM IN GAZA CITY IS BEING USED AS A MODEL FOR FAMILY PLANNING THROUGHOUT THE GAZA STRIP. A VISIT TO THE NEW GOI HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN RAFIAH DID NOT IMPRESS THE STAFFDEL THAT THE GOI WAS MEASURABLY IMPROVING THE REFUGEES' STANDARD OF LIVING. (COMMENT: EMBOFFS HAVE SEEN BETTER EXAMPLES OF GOI HOUSING IN THE DEVELOPMENTS THATN UNRWA DISPLAYED ON THIS TOUR.) MCELHINEY OBSERVED THAT THE GOI WAS ONLY MOVING THE REFUGEES FROM ONE CAMP TO ANOTHER, WHATEVER THE NAME MIGHT BE. IN THE FUTURE, HOWEVER, THE GOI IS OFFERING RESIDENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO BUY INTO THE NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS ALONG WITH THE REFUGEES, WHICH WILL FURTHER BLUR DEMARCATION BETWEEN RESIDENTS AND REFUGEES.

5. LATER THE STAFFDEL MET MILGOV REP CAPTAIN SCHRAGA,
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WHOSE REMARKS ON UNRWA/GAZA INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

--UNRWA DOES AN IMPORTANT JOB, BUT IT SHOULD ALLOCATE ITS RESOURCES ON DIFFERENT PRIORITIES IN DIFFERENT PLACES. GAZANS DO NOT NEED UNRWA, EXCEPT FOR POLITICAL STATUS AND UNRWA FUNDS FREED IN GAZA COULD BE SPENT ELSEWHERE. THE REFUGEES DO NOT LIVE ON UNRWA RATIONS, AND UNRWA COULD STOP SUPPLYING THEM. WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT HEALTH PROGRAM, THE REFUGEES DO NOT NEED THE UNRWA HEALTH SERVICES. THE GOI CAN PROVIDE BETTER SCHOOLING, WHICH HAS BOTH THE EGYPTIAN CURRICULUM AND GOES BEYOND THE NINTH GRADE.

--THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF DOES NOT SPEAK ARABIC AND HAS TO DEPEND ON ITS LOCALS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING.

--UNRWA COULD OBTAIN INFORMATION ON INCOME LEVELS FOR RECTIFICATION BY DIRECT OBSERVATION OF REFUGEE HOUSING PURCHASES.

--THERE IS NO SECURITY PROBLEM IN GAZA.

6. CAPTAIN SCHRAGA BELIEVED THE GOI COULD AND WOULD ASSUME ITS RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE REFUGEES, AS IT WOULD FOR ALL OF GAZA, IF UNRWA SHOULD FOLD; HOWEVER, THE FINANCIAL BURDEN WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE. CANCELLATION OF UNRWA, HE FELT, WOULD BE A POLITICAL GAMBLE, UNLESS REFUGEE STATUS COULD BE GUARANTEED. (STAFFDEL REPORTED THAT DEPUTY DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, MFA, MELAMED, TOLD THEM, BOTH AT APRIL 27 LUNCH AND AGAIN ON APRIL 28, THAT THE STATUS QUO FOR UNRWA WAS BEST, SINCE ANY CHANGES WOULD BRING MORE PROBLEMS THAN BENEFITS.)

7. AT LUNCH, GAZA MAYOR RASHID SHAWA BASICALLY CONFIRMED UNRWA'S REPORT. THE STAFFDEL WAS TOLD THAT THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GAZANS, ESPECIALLY REFUGEES, NEED MORE ASSISTANCE, AND THAT LIFE IN THE GAZA STRIP IS IMPROVING, BUT NOT DUE TO THE ISRAELIS WHO CONTINUE TO LIMIT WATER ACCESS FOR THE PALESTINIANS BUT USE IT FOR THE NEW SETTLEMENTS. (COMMENT: GAZA HAS A SALINITY PROBLEM IN ITS WATER SUPPLY BECAUSE OF PRESENT OVERUSE FOR IRRIGATION. THE GOI CLAIMS THAT THE WATER FOR SINAI SETTLEMENTS DOES NOT COME FROM GAZA SOURCES. THE FEW SETTLERS IN GAZA ITSELF PROBABLY DO USE MINOR AMOUNTS.) THE MAYOR FELT THAT GAZA COULD FEASIBLY BE SELF-SUPPORTING AS A PORT FOR TRANS-SHIPMENT OF ARAB COUNTRY IMPORTS.

8. IN SUMMARIZING THEIR MEETING FOR CHARGE VIETS, THE STAFFDEL GAVE THEIR JUDGMENT THAT UNRWA IS, ON BALANCE, AN EFFICIENT OPERATION, WHICH HAS A FEW PROBLEMS. THEY SAID THAT THEY WERE FAVORABLY IMPRESSED THAT UNRWA CONTRIBUTED TO THE STABILITY OF THE REGION. THE STAFFDEL ALSO NOTED THIER CONCERN THAT THE LEVEL OF UNRWA RESOURCES WAS TO LOW BECAUSE MANY CONTRIBUTORS, OTHER THAN THE U.S., WERE NOT DOING THIER FAIR SHARE.

9. THIS MESSAGE HAS NOT BEEN CLEARED BY STAFFDEL.
LEWIS

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Message Attributes

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